

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

The longing for comfort has never been more urgent. Many in our world are living with pain and sorrow and uncertainty. For the last 18 months, our news bulletins on television have caused fear and panic – daily statistics have been engraved in the minds of many and this has caused its own particular health issues – There has rarely a day gone by that we don't hear the word – Mental Health.

Yes, our mental health has been tested. People have been isolated and lonely, certainly during the lockdowns. Many faced their last days with few if any comforters near them.

When Covid 19 was doing its best to strike fear into the hearts of people, even the solace of a funeral service was impossible for some.

We have been, and we are still, in a time of testing.

Covid has come from nowhere and tested the strongest.

But testing is not something new, for we all face testing in our lives.

I'm sure that we can think back to schooldays and remember these challenging words – there will be a test this week.

In our journey through the Lord's prayer we now meet with the issue of temptation and evil. It's something that we cannot sweep under the carpet as Christians. Temptation in the Lord's prayer means testing. Jesus is saying to the disciples, pray that you will be led from times of testing and delivered from evil.

To Jesus, there was a very real threat of temptation and evil in the world and he faced it and he knew that his followers would also face it.

It is interesting that the first event after our Lord's baptism takes Jesus into the wilderness led by the Spirit. This testing has a purpose.

Here we see a time of blessing, and a time of testing, go hand in hand.

How often is it, that this is also the way for us? We go from highs to lows in our life, perhaps even daily.

Jesus heard the voice of God in his baptism, *"You are my Son with whom I am well pleased"* you can't get much higher encouragement than that, and then shortly afterwards, he heard another voice in the wilderness which contradicted this, and said, *"If you are the Son of God."* – You can't get much more discouragement than that.

The best tactic of the Devil is to discourage Christians. If the Devil gets you discouraged, he is delighted.

Jesus' ministry was about to begin and it began with the severest of tests.

Whose voice are we listening to today?

It is easy to hear the voice of God here on a Sunday morning, when we are gathered to worship him, singing hymns, saying communal prayers and listening to a positive message, but come Monday morning when we are back to the routine of life, when we are away from the encouragement and protection of the Church, we may well hear another voice which may even challenge our faith.

So what voice are we listening to?

The voice of God which wants to confirm our status with him *"You are my child"* or the voice of the Adversary, *"are you really a child of God?"*

From great privilege to great trial there will often be but a step.

Let us never be surprised when we are tempted or tested. Jesus said to the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, near the end of his ministry:

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Matthew 26:41

What does it mean to "fall into temptation?"

Falling into temptation suggests that we crash down, that we have given in and we have fallen from a great height.

Read the stories of all the great saints in the Bible and you will see that they all met their Waterloo at some point in their lives, and each and every one was tempted at their point of weakness.

Yes, the Tempter knows our Achilles heel and so Jesus knew all about the power of temptation and testing when he was cast into the desert.

Imagine a salesman knocking at your door. You open the door, and he tells you what he is selling. At that point, if you're not interested, it's not hard to say, "Sorry, I'm not interested. Try the nice folks next door."

But suppose you invite this person into your home. He sits down in your living room and makes his presentation. He shows you the product. He talks to you about how much you need this and how much better your life will be if you have it. Some relationship begins to be formed and your mind and your heart become engaged. Now it's harder to say "No."

This is what it means to "enter into" temptation. You are engaged with it. You let it inside and it's sitting in your living room. You've become connected to it. The temptation that landed in your flesh has found a place in your affections.

So, the secret of our battle against temptation is to shut the door immediately and not to let the tempting voice get a foothold.

We must also be encouraged that Jesus knew what it was to be tempted.
Hebrews 4:15

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."

At significant times in Jesus' ministry he withdrew to a quiet place. The Wilderness, the Mount of Transfiguration, The Garden of Gethsemane. All occasions, where he had to time to think about his Mission, yes, where he was tested.

The wilderness experience, the beginning, was his opportunity where he could thrash out what his Ministry and Mission was going to be like. How he could draw people into God's Kingdom?

So, there was a purpose in this testing and there is a purpose in all our testing in life – often we do not see it at the time and perhaps we will never see it in this lifetime, but we trust that in the light of eternity, we will see God's big plan.

It has often been said that our lives are like a tapestry, not only of the decisions we make, but ultimately the way that we trust God with the unknown outcome of our life's story. As Christians, we must trust that God sees and knows the bigger picture and be assured He has a grand design in mind.

That's what we learn from the oldest book in the Bible, the Book of Job, who was known as the innocent sufferer. God allows Satan to test him. Job loses everything and during his struggles, Job could say the remarkable words, *"When he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."* In the heat of his testing, he never denied God, but he held on believing that there was a greater plan to his pain and suffering.

Someone who went through testing wrote, "When we embrace the many facets of our life, we discover a masterpiece woven by the very hands of our Heavenly Father. Every moment is like a thread – some are brilliant and beautiful, others are tattered and torn. When we look only at the frayed threads, in our moments of isolation, they appear inferior and undesirable. But when woven together by our Faithful God, our darker threads blend beautifully with our lighter more mellow ones. Our beauty coalesces with our pain as God weaves a magnificent tapestry, that ultimately is the beauty of the tapestry of our lives."

Do you recognise the work of the master weaver in your life? Are you willing to embrace the painful stitches that are necessary to create your life story as a work of art? Will you let go of your past and trust God with your future, allowing Him complete oversight of your life – unveiling the masterpiece of you?

But let us take great encouragement this morning, that Jesus stayed the course, he passed the test, and in doing so, we have a friend in Heaven, who can be touched with the feelings of our pain; who knows what we are going through when we are tempted and tested.

We have someone that we can pray to, who hears our cries, who knows the pain that we face. The Bible tells us that he is closer than a brother. That's because His Spirit is within us.

Three times in the wilderness Jesus is tested. His Adversary gets Jesus where he wants him, in the wilderness, hungry and alone. And yet, Jesus was prepared, for 40 days he was fasting, he was praying, he was ready. He was watching. Let the contest begin!

The first attack was at the jugular.

He tests Jesus when Jesus was on his knees starving. Turn those stones into bread – prove yourself to be the Son of God, show me your power, and yet Jesus withstands this temptation, and he tells the Devil that man shall not live by bread alone but by every Word of God.

He shuts the door on this crafty salesman and he send him packing. I don't need what you are selling me Jesus tells him, for I have something much better. I have God's Words to feed my soul.

Herein we see Jesus' secret to fighting temptation, he was steeped in the Word of God. The Words of His sacred Scriptures were engraved on his heart. They were his strength and shield.

The second temptation came quickly on the heels of the first.

Jesus is taken to a mountain top and spread out before him is all the Kingdoms of the world. He is promised them, if he would bow down and worship Satan. The concession was small, the promise was large. Why not a little momentary act for an enormous gain. Who would know? Who would see?

But Jesus saw through this and quoted the Word of God to the Devil, *“You shall worship only the Lord your God and him only shall you serve”*.

Thirdly and finally, he takes him to the top of the Temple and suggests that he proves God and puts God to the test but Jesus said, *“You shall not test the Lord your God”*.

Three favourite weapons used on Jesus:

Turn stones into bread, materialism is what your followers want.

Compromise your belief, bow down and worship evil and you will have all the followers you want.

Work miracles and people will follow you.

The principles behind the three are rebellion of God, a denial of God's existence and a turning away from him.

Three times our Lord quotes Scriptures as his sword and his defence and the Adversary had no answer to this. Jesus killed the serpent before he struck with his poisonous venom.

So the words of the Lord's prayer are vitally important to us as Christians, lead us from the time of testing and deliver us from evil.

Keep going through this time of testing. Trust in the love of God, that He is with you each step of the way and that you are part of his great tapestry and when your testing has finished, you will come forth as gold.

The truth is, He is able to help you when you are tempted. He is able to restore you when you've fallen. In the words of Jude 24.

²⁴ Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To him be glory and honour—now and forevermore! Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.